

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) An apparatus for treatment of foodstuffs for processing and subsequent drying, comprising

an endless conveyor belt configured to convey foodstuffs which along part of its length follows a helical path to form a stack, said helical path defining a central space in the stack,

the conveyor belt having passages for letting a flow of a gaseous medium in the vertical as well as horizontal direction through the stack,

an end portion of the stack, in which said stack is vertically surrounded by an encapsulation that is essentially tight in the horizontal direction to permit a seal, the encapsulation being formed by the co-extension of an outer circumferential wall and an inner circumferential wall vertically surrounding the end portion of the stack, wherein the outer circumferential wall and the inner circumferential wall are stationary during operation of the belt, the encapsulation extending along substantially the vertical distance of one of the outer circumferential wall and inner circumferential wall,

a first end closure arranged to cover the conveyor belt in its entire helical path, wherein said first end closure fits tightly against the outer and inner circumferential walls of the encapsulation to permit a seal,

a first supply of a first gaseous medium to said central space, and

a second supply of a second gaseous medium to said encapsulation,

said encapsulation being arranged to direct the flow of the second gaseous medium in such a manner that it is passed in the vertical direction from said encapsulation to the rest of the stack.

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2. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the first gaseous medium is humid water vapor.

3. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the first gaseous medium is saturated water vapor.

4. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the second gaseous medium is overheated water vapor.

5. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which said encapsulation is arranged at the upper part of the stack.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which a second end closure is arranged over the central space.

8. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which lateral pieces at a longitudinal edge of the conveyor belt form an outer wall of the stack, which defines the stack outwards in the radial direction.

9. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which lateral pieces at a longitudinal edge of the conveyor belt form an inner wall of the stack which defines the stack inwards in the radial direction to define said central space.

10. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which a third end closure is arranged against the lowermost turn formed in the stack, said third end closure being arranged transversely of the central space defined by the conveyor belt.

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11. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 2, in which the source of supply of humid water vapor comprises a fan.

12. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the conveying direction of the conveyor belt is arranged towards the encapsulation.

13. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which the stack is arranged in a housing comprising an inlet and an outlet for the conveyor belt.

14. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 13, in which the housing further comprises a drain for draining off condensed water vapor.

15. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which said outer and inner circumferential walls have the same height.

16. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which said outer circumferential wall extends vertically along the full height of the stack, and said inner circumferential wall extends vertically along a portion of the stack, whereby said outer circumferential wall optionally has openings or perforations along the portion of the stack not covered by the inner circumferential wall.

17. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in which said outer and inner circumferential walls extend along the full height of the stack, whereby both walls have openings or perforations along a portion of the stack.

18. (Currently amended) A method for treating foodstuffs for the purpose of processing and drying, comprising:

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(a) providing an endless conveyor belt configured to convey foodstuffs which along part of its length follows a helical path to form a stack, said conveyor belt having passages for letting a flow of a gaseous medium through the stack in the vertical as well as the horizontal directions, wherein:

(i) the stack defining a central space, and

(ii) the stack comprising a non-encapsulated stack portion and, adjacent thereto, an encapsulated stack portion being encapsulated in the vertical direction by an encapsulation that is essentially tight in the horizontal direction to permit a seal, the encapsulation being formed by the co-extension of an outer circumferential wall and an inner circumferential wall vertically surrounding the encapsulated stack portion, wherein the outer circumferential wall and the inner circumferential wall are stationary during operation of the belt, the encapsulation extending along substantially the vertical distance of one of the outer circumferential wall and inner circumferential wall,

(b) providing a first end closure arranged to cover the conveyor belt in its entire helical path, wherein said first end closure fits tightly against the outer and inner circumferential walls of the encapsulation to permit a seal,

(c) supplying a flow of a first gaseous medium to said central space for further conveyance to the non-encapsulated stack portion through said passages for letting through a flow of a first gaseous medium in the horizontal direction,

(d) supplying a flow of a second gaseous medium to said upper encapsulated stack portion,

(e) wherein said encapsulation directing the flow of the second gaseous medium in such a manner that it flows in an essentially vertical direction from said encapsulated stack portion to said non-encapsulated stack portion, and

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(f) the flow of the second gaseous medium, which enters the encapsulated stack portion and flows essentially vertically, affecting the flow of the first gaseous medium which is conveyed to the non-encapsulated stack portion so that the first gaseous medium is prevented from flowing towards the encapsulated stack portion.

19. (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 18, in which the first gaseous medium is humid water vapor.

20. (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 18, in which the first gaseous medium is saturated water vapor.

21. (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 18, in which the second gaseous medium is overheated water vapor.

22. (Previously presented) A method as claimed in claim 18, comprising the step of arranging the conveyor belt in a conveying direction towards the encapsulated stack portion.

23. (Previously presented) An apparatus as claimed in claim 3, in which the source of supply of saturated water vapor comprises a fan.

24. (Currently amended) An apparatus for treatment of foodstuffs for processing and subsequent drying, comprising

(a) an endless conveyor belt configured to convey foodstuffs which along part of its length follows a helical path to form a stack, said helical path defining a central space in the stack,

(b) the conveyor belt having passages for letting a flow of a gaseous medium in the vertical as well as horizontal direction through the stack,

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(c) an end portion of the stack being surrounded by an encasement being essentially tight in the horizontal direction, said encasement comprising:

(i) an outer circumferential wall with first and second end edges, wherein the first end edge is essentially tight in the horizontal direction against the stack to permit a seal, and wherein the outer circumferential wall is stationary during operation of the belt,

(ii) an inner circumferential wall with first and second end edges, wherein the first end edge is essentially tight in the horizontal direction against the stack to permit a seal, and wherein the outer circumferential wall is stationary during operation of the belt, and

(iii) an end closure disposed beyond the portion of the stack defined by the entire helical path of the conveyor belt, wherein the end closure fits tightly against the second end edges of the outer and inner circumferential walls to permit a seal,

(d) a first supply of a first gaseous medium to said central space, and

(e) a second supply of a second gaseous medium to said encasement, said encasement being arranged to direct the flow of the second gaseous medium in such a manner that it is passed in the vertical direction from said encasement to the rest of the stack.

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